Two Christmas Stories

HESBA STRETTON

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'That's an old waistcoat of mine.'

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TWO CHRISTMAS STORIES

SAM FRANKLIN'S SAVINGS-BANK

A MISERABLE CHRISTMAS AND

A HAPPY NEW YEAR

BY

HESBA STRETTON

AUTHOR OF

'LOST GIP' 'CASSY' 'JESSICA'S FIRST PRAYER' ETC.

WITH TWO ILLUSTRATIONS

HENRY S. KING & CO., LONDON

1876

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SAM FRANKLIN'S SAVINGS-BANK.

IF any one had told Sam Franklin before he married that he would ever save money out of his wages, he would have laughed the idea to scorn; they had never been more than enough when he had only himself to keep, and when there was a wife into the bargain, what chance would there be for him to have a penny to put by? Yet, before he had been a husband many weeks, he had made the discovery that the wages which had only been enough for one were rather more than enough for two. There were no dinners at the cookshops to be paid for, no long evenings spent in the public-houses, no laundresses' bills to meet. He had a great deal more comfort, with a somewhat smaller outlay.

When Sam found half-a-crown in his pocket over and above the sum he allowed his wife for housekeeping and rent, he hardly knew what to do with it.

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His own fireside was very comfortable, and he did not care to leave it for the tavern. He and his wife were living on the first-floor of a house in a decent, quiet street, mostly occupied by artisans like himself, though the houses were from three to four stories high, and had been built for richer people. They had a sitting-room, with a bed room behind it, and the use of a back kitchen for cooking and washing; so the place was quite large enough for comfort. Ann Franklin had notions of cleanliness and smartness, which made her take great pride in herself and all her belongings. The parlour, as she liked it to be called, was kept bright and cheerful, and that man must have had a strange idea of comfort who preferred the noise and smoke of a public-house taproom.

What, then, was Sam to do with his spare half-crown? It doubled itself into five shillings, and by-and-by a golden half-sovereign lay among the silver and copper he carried loose in his pocket. He was a man of few words—a close man, his comrades called him—and silent as the grave concerning his own affairs. Had he told one of them when he was about to be married? Not his best friend amongst them! Had he mentioned it as a piece of news interesting to himself that he had a son born? Never! He despised men who could not keep a still tongue in their heads, but must prate about all they did or

thought. Even with his wife he was sparing of words, though he liked her to tell him everything she did, and keep no secret from him. But then Ann was only a woman ; a man should have more control over his tongue.

So Sam Franklin did not say a word about his savings, though they seemed to grow like seed sown in good ground. Every week he gave his wife the sum they had first agreed upon, and she made the best of it cheerfully, letting him know how every penny was spent, and sometimes wondering to him how his comrades' wives managed to be so much smarter than she was. At first he had thoughts of buying her a new bonnet or shawl, but he scarcely liked to own that he had been keeping back the money from her. This difficulty became greater as the sum grew larger ; and, besides that, the possession of it began to get a hold upon him. It gave to him a secret consciousness of wealth among his fellow-workmen, which was very pleasant for a time ; but by-and-by this feeling passed away, and a strange, unaccountable dread of being poor took possession of him. He began to talk about bad times, and the high prices of provisions and clothing, and the expenses of a family, though his own consisted of his cheery, managing wife, and one boy only. But this change in Sam Franklin was so gradual, that neither

himself nor his wife had any idea what was going on. He spent his evenings at home, and went nearly every Sunday to the place of worship which Ann and Johnny constantly attended. Ann was very proud of her tall, fine-looking husband, whose clothes she kept in such good order that he looked, in her eyes at least, quite a gentleman. No one had a word to say against him, though if it had been otherwise, Ann was too true a wife to let it be said in her presence. He was industrious and steady, and kind to her and the boy; and if she had to work hard to keep them both tidy and respectable, why, it was the fault of the bad times, not her husband's.

When Sam Franklin had saved ten pounds, and had two Bank of England notes to take care of, his difficulty and perplexity had very much increased. There was no Post-office Savings-bank, and he had no faith in the old savings-banks, for he could remember how his poor old mother had lost every penny of her painful savings by the breaking of the one she had put her money into. He dare not tell Ann about it, after keeping such a secret so long. The money became a trouble to him, though perhaps it was his most cherished possession. Certainly he thought of it oftener than of Ann or Johnny, for wherever he hid it, it could not but be a source of anxiety to him. If he took it to the work-yard with him he was fearful of

losing it, whilst if he left it at home he was quite as much alarmed lest Ann should find it. How it would alter the face of things if she discovered that he was the owner of all that money, and had never told her!

At length, when his savings mounted up to twenty pounds, a bright idea struck him one day. He stayed at home the next Sunday evening, and having found his old wedding waistcoat, which was lined with a good strong linen lining, he carefully unpicked a part of one of the seams large enough to take in a folded bank-note, and spread them as high as he could reach with his finger up and down the breast of it. He could not stitch it up again as neatly as it had been sewn before, but he was obliged to trust to Ann not noticing it, for it was a worn-out waistcoat and past her regard altogether: yet when she came home the first thing she saw was that he had it on with his coat buttoned across it.

'Good gracious, Sam!' she cried, 'whatever made you put on that old thing?'

'It's warmer than any I've got,' he answered, putting his hand up against the breast of it where the bank-notes lay safe and hidden.

'It's so old-fashioned,' she said, discontentedly; 'but it doesn't matter much if you won't go out of doors in it. Men have no notion of things.'

'What was the text, Ann?' he inquired, simply to turn away her attention from the old waistcoat.

'Oh! it hadn't anything to do with us,' she replied, more cheerfully; 'it was, 'The love of money is the root of all evil.' Nothing for us in that, you know, though the preacher did say we might love it as much from craving after it as having it. Well, I neither have it, nor crave it.'

Sam felt uncomfortable, and did not make any further remark. He told his wife he should always put on his old waistcoat when he came in from his work; and he continued to do so regularly for some time, then occasionally, until after awhile the waistcoat simply hung on a nail behind the bedroom door, only being taken down once a week by Ann, to have the dust brushed from it. Every now and then he had another note to add to those he had already secured; and he became so skilled in opening and sewing the seam, that there was no fear of Ann noticing any difference. Even yet he would wear it upon a rainy Sunday, feeling a deep satisfaction in his admirable scheme for concealing and taking care of his savings.

Month after month, and year after year, the old waistcoat kept his secret faithfully. His eyes rested upon it first thing in the morning and last thing at night, hanging behind the door, as if it would hang there for ever. He grew more stingy then ever,

grudging his wife her bits of blue and pink ribbon, with which she made herself smart, and altogether refused to send Johnny to a school where the fee was sixpence a week, instead of the threepence he had paid hitherto at a dame's-school. He was longing to make up fifty pounds; he had already forty-five in his waistcoat, and how much more fifty pounds sounded than forty-five!

He had between three and four pounds towards this very desirable end, when one night, upon his return from work, he went as usual into the back room to wash his hands and face, and glanced at once towards the familiar object behind the door. But it was not there! The place was bare, and the nail empty. The mere sight of an empty nail in that place filled him with terror; but no doubt Ann had laid it away in some drawer. His voice, as he called to her, was broken and tremulous.

'Where have you put my old waistcoat?' he asked. He could hear her pouring the boiling water over the tea in the next room, and she did not answer before clicking down the lid of the teapot.

'Oh, it was only harbouring the dust,' she answered, in a cheerful voice, 'so I made a right good bargain, and sold it for ninepence to an old-clothesman.'

The shock was so sudden that Sam staggered as

if he had received a heavy blow, and fell on the floor. He did not quite lose his senses, for he felt Ann trying to lift him up, and heard her asking what ailed him. In a minute or two he managed to get up and sit down on the foot of the bed, but still he found himself giddy and stunned.

'Where is it?' he cried, bursting into tears and sobs, like a child; 'where is it?'

'The old waistcoat?' she asked, thinking he was gone out of his mind.

'Yes!' he said. 'There was nine fivepound notes in it; forty-five pounds in Bank of England notes!'

At first Ann thought his head had been hurt by his fall, and he was rambling; but as he kept on moaning over his loss, and confessing how he had concealed the notes from her, she began to believe him, and all the sooner when he pulled out the three sovereigns he had saved towards the tenth note and flung them on the floor in angry despair.

'And I don't know the man from Adam!' cried Ann. 'I never saw him before; and he'll take very good care I never see him again. Oh, Sam! how could you? how could you keep it a secret all these years, when I never bought as much as a yard of ribbon or a collar on the sly? I can't forgive it, or forget it either.'

She felt it very hard that Sam should not have

trusted her. The loss of the money was hard, and she could not help thinking what a large sum it was, and what it might have done for Johnny. But the loss of faith in her husband was ten times worse. How could she ever believe in him again? or how could she ever be sure again that he really loved and trusted her?

It was a very miserable evening. Sam bewailed his money so bitterly that Ann began to fancy he would rather have lost her or his child. She sat silent and indignant, whilst he, unlike himself, was almost raving with angry sorrow. She did not speak to him the next morning before he set off to the yard, though she knew he had lain awake all night like herself, and had not swallowed a morsel of breakfast. It was a cold, wintry day, with a drizzling mist filling the air. Sam was wet through before he reached his work, and there was no chance of drying his clothes. He was wet through when he came home, but there were no dry, warm things laid out for him. He might wait upon himself, thought Ann; it would be well for him to see the difference between a good wife and a bad one. He would not condescend to find a change of clothing for himself, and he sat shivering on the hearth all night, in spite of the warm, cheerful blaze of the bright fire.

By the time the week was ended, Sam Franklin

was compelled to knock off work. Severe rheumatic fever had set in, and the doctor said he must not expect to get back to the yard for three months or more. Perhaps it was the best thing that could have befallen him, for it brought back all the old warm love for him to his wife's heart, which had been grieved and estranged by his closeness and want of trust in her. She nursed him tenderly, never saying a word to blame him now he could not get out of her way, as many wives would have done. Before his illness was half over she was forced to pawn all her own best clothing, as well as his, to buy the mere necessaries of life. Never had Sam Franklin thought his wife would have to go day after day to the pawn-shop; but she did it so cheerfully that half of the sting of it was taken away.

'Nancy,' he said, one morning, 'all night long I've had a text ringing in my head, 'You cannot serve God and mammon,' 'You cannot serve God and mammon!' Why, I used to think I was doing God a service when I put on my Sunday clothes and went to church of a Sunday morning with you. As if He'd think that were serving Him! And then all the week I was worshipping that old waistcoat of mine hanging behind the door, as much as any poor heathen worships blocks of wood and stone. I begin to think it was God who put it in your heart

to sell it to the old-clothesman. But how can I serve Him now, Nancy, my girl? I can't do anything save lie in this bed and be a burden to you.'

Ann Franklin stooped down and kissed her husband, whispering, 'I don't mind a bit about you being a burden, as you call it;' and after that she opened a Bible and read these words: 'Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we may work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom he hath sent.'

'Ay! I see it,' he said, after a long pause, 'that's a work I can begin better here, perhaps, than in the yard at my work. I can work for God that way, lying here on my back as helpless as a baby. And now I come to think of it, Jesus Christ never served mammon any way, and if I believe in Him I shall try to be like Him. It's no use praying to God on Sundays and doing contrary all the week, wailing after money and such like.'

'Sam,' answered his wife, 'I've not been believing in him as I ought, for I've been fretting after that old waistcoat ever so, thinking how useful the money would be now; but if you'll help me I'll help you, and we'll try to believe in Him just the same as if we could see him coming into the room and talking to us.'

'But that would be seeing, not believing.'

'So it would,' she answered, 'and he said himself, "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." We must trust in Him without seeing Him.'

But it was a hard trial to trust in God whilst all their possessions were disappearing one after another. Sam was a long while in fully recovering his strength; and when he was fit to go back to the yard they were pretty deeply in debt. Yet never had they been so happy in former days. Their simple faith in the Saviour gave them a peace different from anything they had ever felt before; and Sam, who had now no secret care or pleasure to brood over in his own mind, grew frank and open with his wife. They pinched and denied themselves to get out of debt; and when the next winter came they were again in the comfortable circumstances which had been theirs when Ann sold the valuable old waistcoat.

'Sam,' said Ann, a day or two before Christmas-day, 'Johnny's been putting threepence a week into the school club. He's got as much as nine shillings in, and he's to have twopence a shilling added to it if we buy him clothes with it, but we can have the nine shillings out if we like. Come home in time to go with us to the school to-night.'

'Ay, ay!' said Sam, heartily, 'I'll go with Johnny to get his little fortune.'

It was quite dark in the evening when the three started off for the school where the weekly pence were paid in. But as they locked their parlour-door and turned into the street, they saw a girl about Johnny's age, with bare feet and no bonnet on her head, standing on the outer door-sill, shivering and crying, as she looked at the dismal night, with flakes of snow drifting lazily in the air. They all knew her well; she was the little girl belonging to the tenant of the attic two floors above them. Ann had often given fragments of bread and meat to Johnny to take to her, but she had always shrunk from inviting her into their parlour, because she was too dirty and ragged. Now, as the child stood crying and shivering on the door-step, her heart smote her for her want of kindness, and she stopped to speak to her gently.

'What's the matter?' she asked.

'Father says I must go and beg,' she answered, crying more bitterly, 'and I'm frightened, and it's so bitter cold. But we must pay our rent, he says, or be turned out, and he doesn't know where to go to, and is very ill, coughin' ever so. We owe for three weeks now, that's nine shillings, and I don't know where I'm to beg for nine shillings.'

'There's all the coppers I've got,' said Sam puting three or four pence in her hand, and hurrying

on with Ann and Johnny, whilst the girl pattered after them, with her bare feet tingling in the snow. Ann did not speak again till they reached the school, but once or twice she looked back and saw the little ragged figure following them. There was no one in the school-room except themselves and the gentleman who was ready to receive their payment and give them the ticket for buying clothes to the value of ten shillings and sixpence. But before he could write out the ticket Ann glanced round, and saw a thin, care-worn little face peering in through the window.

'Oh, Sam,' she cried, 'we don't want it so badly after all, and I think if it belonged to Him, Jesus Christ, he would give it to the poor man up in the attic to pay his rent with. Don't you think he would?'

'But it's Johnny's little fortune,' said Sam, 'and we should lose one and sixpence if we took it out for that.'

'Johnny 'ud be glad to give it to poor little Bell?' asked Ann, with her hand on the boy's shoulder.

'Yes, mother, for little Bell,' he said readily.

'Johnny's clothes are warm, if they're shabby,' pursued Ann, 'and there's that poor little creature in rags, and barefoot. My heart aches for her, Sam. If it were our boy, and they'd nine shillings they didn't want badly, what should we like them to do?'

'Well, Ann, I give up,' he said; 'after all, it's your savings, not mine.'

Still he was not quite satisfied about it. That man in the attic was very probably a drunken vagabond, and deserved to be turned out for not paying his rent. To be sure he had been a tenant nearly a year, and had been quiet enough, meddling with nobody, and not putting himself in anybody's way. Sam had not seen him above two or three times, and then he had only just caught sight of a thin stooping figure, with a shabby old coat buttoned up to the throat, as if the man had no shirt to wear. Anyhow it was Ann's business, and if any wife deserved to have her own way in a thing like this, it was his wife.

Ann picked up the money, which was counted out to her, with a pleasant smile upon her face. It was snowing very fast when they opened the school-room door; but there was little Bell still, with her face pressed against the window and one foot drawn up out of the snow to keep it warmer. Ann called to her, and she ran quickly towards them.

'I prayed to God for the money this morning,' she said, looking wistfully up into Ann's smiling face, 'but He couldn't have heard me, for He never sent it.'

'He's going to send it now,' answered Ann.

'Will an angel come with it?' she asked.

'Ay!' answered Sam, stooping down and lifting

the child in his arms, for he was quite strong again, and she was too thin and puny to be much weight. He did not like to see her bare feet on the snow, and if Ann was going to do them a good turn, why should he not do another?

'An angel with shining, white clothes on, and wings?' said little Bell.

'No; she's wearing an old bonnet and a faded shawl,' answered Sam, 'and her wings aren't grown yet, I'm glad to say.'

'For shame, Sam!' cried his wife; but she was glad to hear from his voice that he was agreeing heartily with her self-denial. It was not far back to their home, but instead of turning into their own pleasant room they all marched up two flights of stairs to the attic.

It was a low room with a shelving roof, and lighted by a skylight, of which two or three of the panes were broken, and a few stray snow-flakes were floating in, and hardly melting in the chilly air. There was an old rusty stove instead of a fire-place, but no fire in it; and in one corner lay a hard mattress, on which they could see in the dim light the figure of a man, barely covered with a few clothes. As he lifted up his head to speak to them a racking cough choked him, and it was a minute or two before he could utter a word.

'We've been your neighbours a long while,' said Ann, gently, 'and I'm ashamed I never came to see you before. We've brought little Bell home, for it's a dreadful night out of doors, not fit for a grown-up person, scarcely.'

'But the landlord says he'll turn us out to-morrow,' gasped the sick man.

'No! no!' answered Ann; 'that's all right. We've got the money ready for him, and now we'll make you as comfortable as we can. Sam run down and bring me a light, that's a good fellow.'

'I'm not going to live long,' said the stranger, 'and I'm afraid of being turned out, but I can never pay you back again. There's no more work in me, and my money's done; I can't pay you.'

'Never mind,' she answered, 'we're only doing as we'd be done by, so don't you worry about it. Here's Sam coming with a candle; and now I'll put your bed straight.'

But when the light was brought in, and Ann looked down at the poor covering on the mattress, she uttered a little scream of amazement, and sank down on a box beside the bed of the sick man. Sam himself stood as still as a stone, staring, as she did, at the clothes which lay across the bed. There was his old wedding waiscoat; he knew it by a patch which Ann had put into it very carefully. Was it

possible that the nine five-pound notes were still safely hidden in the lining ?

'That's an old waistcoat of mine,' he said, as soon as he could speak ; 'I never thought to see it again.'

'I bought it soon after I came here,' answered the attic tenant ; 'an old-clothes man offered it for a shilling. It's been a good warm waistcoat ; but I've worn it for the last time.'

'I'll give you a couple of blankets for it,' said Sam, eagerly. 'My wife sold it without asking me, and it was my wedding waistcoat, you see. I didn't want to part with it.'

'Take it, and welcome, without any blankets,' he answered ; 'you've done enough for me already.'

'No,' said Ann, 'I'll bring the blankets.'

She was trembling with excitement, but she would not leave the poor man until she had stopped up the broken panes, made the bed comfortable, and wrapped him well up in some warm blankets. Then she went down to their own room, and found Sam waiting for her before opening the seam in the lining of the waistcoat. Even his hand shook, but he managed to unpick a few stitches, and draw out a crumpled bit of paper. Yes ; they were all there, the nine five-pound notes he had never expected to touch again.

'Oh, Sam !' she cried, with tears in her eyes, 'do you think you will love them again ?'

For a few minutes he sat still, looking earnestly at the notes, with a strange expression of fear upon his face. He compared the peace and happiness of the last few months with the heavy burden his secret had been to him. He thought of how he had begun to learn to think of God when he awoke in the morning, and when he was falling asleep at night. If he kept the money, would it be the same? Yet would it be right to throw away what God might intend them to keep as a provision against some time of need? Perhaps God saw the time was come when he might be trusted with money again.

'Ann,' he said, 'If I thought these notes would tempt me to serve mammon again, I'd throw them all on to the fire yonder. You take charge of them, my lass, and put them into the Post Office Savings-bank, that was opened a few months ago. Thank God I lost them, and thank God I've found them again.'

For the next few weeks Sam Franklin and his wife nursed and tended the dying man in the attic as tenderly as if he had been their brother, teaching him what Sam had learned himself, that even on a sick bed he might work the works of God, by believing on Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent. When he died, blessing them for their brotherly love to him, they took charge of little Bell, and no doubt spent as much upon her as the money laid by in the savings-bank.

But she grew up like a daughter to them; and not long ago she became their daughter by marrying Johnny Franklin. The wedding took place a day or two before Christmas, the anniversary of the day when Johnny readily gave up his small fortune for little Bell.

'Oh, Sam!' said his wife, as she thought of it, 'how would it have been if we'd kept the nine shillings to buy clothes for Johnny?'

'We should have kept the nine shillings and lost the forty-five pounds,' answered Sam. 'It's true, "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will he pay him again."'

'Yes, but it's more than that,' said Ann; 'we'd a chance of doing something like Jesus Christ would have done in our place, and we did it. That was the best of all.'

She saw the stranger produce a pistol.

See page 46.

A MISERABLE CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR.

IF you had asked any of the poor people of Ilverton who was the prettiest and best girl in the town, they would, one and all, have answered promptly, 'Dr. Layard's daughter.' There was scarcely a poor man or woman, who did not know the way to Dr. Layard's surgery, where he gave advice gratis to all who could not really afford to pay for it. And there was scarcely one who did not know the look of Dr. Layard's bright, comfortable, old-fashioned kitchen, and the pleasant, tender smile on Kate Layard's face, as she listened pityingly to their sad stories, and sent them away home with happier hearts and lighter spirits.

If it had not been for her poor people, as she called them, Kate Layard's life would have been utterly dull and idle. She had no household duties

to see after; her aunt, who had taken the management of all such matters whilst she was still a little girl, would not brook any interference with her rule; and preferred to have Kate sitting in the drawing-room, idly busy over fancy work, or practising music to which no one listened, and painting water-colour sketches, at which no one looked. There were three boys younger than herself, but they were all away, either at school or college; and the long days passed by listlessly, for want of something to do that was really worth the doing. But for her father's poor patients, and he had a good many of them, she would have felt her life to be quite lost.

It was on a dull, dark day, near the end of November, with a thick yellow fog pressing close against the windows, which prevented her from going out, that she felt particularly disconsolate and weary. Aunt Brooks was busy about the house, making arrangements for a thorough cleaning down before Christmas; but she steadily refused Kate's offers of help. Secretly Aunt Brooks was fearful of Dr. Layard finding out that Kate would make quite as good a housekeeper as herself; and she shrank from the idea of going into some little lonely house of her own, where she could have no more than one little maid to order about, and no scope at all for her own powers. She did not think of Kate having no scope for hers. If

she had, it is quite possible that she would have laid down her command, and heroically withdrawn to leave Kate her proper post.

'I wish something would happen to me!' sighed Kate, on that dull November morning. At the very moment a servant brought in a letter, just delivered by the postman. Kate was not quite sure of the hand-writing; not quite sure. But all at once a vision of her father's surgery flashed across her mind, with a frank, noble, pleasant-looking young man in her father's place, giving advice and prescription, and good-tempered, cheery words to her poor people. It was Philip Carey, her father's assistant, who had left them some months ago. It seemed to Kate that she had never been dull while he was there. Yes! the letter was from Philip Carey; it bore his name. A bright colour flushed up in Kate's face. If there had been any one in the room, she would have carried it away to read it in solitude, although she did not yet know a single word in it. But she was quite alone, and no one could see the colour in her cheeks, or the ready tears that sprang into her eyes, and made the lines look dim.

'I used to fancy sometimes,' said Philip Carey, 'that I might win your love; but I never dared to be sure of it. I was too poor then, and my future was too uncertain, for me to say how dearly I loved you.

But now I am appointed the assistant physician at Lentford Hospital, I think your father would be satisfied with my prospects. I do not write to him but to you. If there is any hope for me, if you can trust your whole happiness to me, write but the one word "Come," and I will come over immediately after my official appointment on the 30th, and speak to Dr. Layard. If you do not write, I shall understand your silence.'

Kate sat, with the letter crushed between her hands, gazing blissfully into the fire. All the world was changed, quite suddenly. The day was no longer dull and dreary. It seemed almost too good to be true. Philip Carey was the very man to be a physician in the Lentford Hospital; he was so gentle and considerate with the poor, and so skilful as well. She recollected how all her poor people had bewailed and mourned after him when he went away; and what a pang it had often been to her, a pang yet a pleasure, to hear his name so often on their lips. Oh! how good she must be to make herself good enough for him! She must be the best doctor's wife in all Lentford.

With very unsteady fingers she wrote the one word 'Come' as Philip had suggested; and then it occurred to her that she might catch the morning post, and he would receive her answer before night. She directed the envelope in haste, and ran out herself with it

across the square; dropping it into the letter-box with her own hands, and looking after it, as one does sometimes when the letter is a very important one.

Kate kept her precious secret to herself. Aunt Brooks was in a rather testy temper, and it was not easy to begin such a confidential disclosure to her. Dr. Layard was out all day, and only came in late at night, worn out and exhausted. Kate rather rejoiced in the secret being a secret. Everybody would know quite soon enough; for her letter had reached her on the 28th, and Philip was sure to come over on the 30th, for Lentford was only ten miles away, and he could ride to Ilverton as soon as his official appointment was confirmed.

Yet it seemed a long time before the 30th came. Towards the close of the day Kate grew more agitated in her secret gladness. Philip might come in at any hour; he knew they dined at six, and Kate was fully prepared to see him arrive then. But he did not appear; and the dinner passed very nearly in silence, for Kate was unable to talk, and Dr. Layard was tired with his day's work.

'Do you know, Kate,' he said suddenly, 'young Carey is appointed assistant physician at Lentford Hospital? Its a splendid opening for so young a man. But he's a fine fellow is Carey; I shall be more than content if one of my boys turns out like him. Ah!

Katie, Katie, you should have set your cap at him when he was here; you'll never have such a chance again.'

The colour mounted to her forehead, and a smile played about her lips, ready to break into a happy laugh. If Philip would but come in now!

'Don't put such notions into Kate's head,' said Aunt Brooks, precisely; 'no well behaved young lady would think of setting her cap at any one.'

It was a restless evening for Kate. One hour after another passed by, and still he did not come. She went to the window, and opened it impatiently. She began to wonder if he meant to come in by the last train, and stay all night. But what would Aunt Brooks say? And what a strange hour it would be to begin to talk to her father about such a subject! She fancied it would take a very long time to introduce it, and afterwards to discuss it. But at half-past eleven Kate was compelled to give up expecting him and go to bed, when the fever of her new happiness having calmed a little, she slept profoundly, and dreamed of no trouble.

But again there followed a morning and evening of expectation, dogged hour after hour by a strengthening disappointment. Kate sat moping over the fire, as Aunt Brooks said, trying to find reasons for Philip's absence and silence. The crumpled letter had been

carefully smoothed out again, and she read it till she knew every word by heart. But the pride and gladness died as her heart grew sick with the sickness of hope deferred. The brief sunshine at last faded quite out of her life, and left her in deeper darkness than before. She waited and trusted till she could wait and trust no longer; and then she gave herself up to the full sense of her bitter mortification and sorrow.

There was no one to notice the change except her father, who was too busy to bestow more than a passing thought or two to her melancholy face and fading colour. Her happiness, like Jonah's gourd, had sprung up in a night and perished in a night; and like him she was ready to exclaim, 'It is better for me to die than to live.'

Christmas was near at hand before Kate recovered at all from her overwhelming sense of wretchedness and mortification. She was a pitiful and tender-hearted girl, fond of giving pleasure to others; and she began to feel as if it was necessary for her own relief to make this miserable Christmas a time of pleasure and festivity to some of her poorer neighbours. If she could not see happiness with her own eyes, she would like to look at it through other people's. It was impossible to remove the heaviness of her heart, but she might try to lighten others'. So

one evening when she and her father were alone together, she approached the subject cautiously.

'Father,' she said, 'I want to make somebody in the world happier.'

Her voice was unconsciously very sorrowful. The burden that was oppressing her had made her feel that other people had heavy burdens to bear. She was learning that, in order to bear her own well, it was necessary to share that of another. Dr. Layard was distressed by the mournfulness of his daughter's tone.

'Make somebody happier!' he repeated; 'well, it is easy enough to do that,'

'How?' asked Kate.

'Help them,' answered Dr. Layard; 'a little help is worth a deal of pity. Helping people is a good step towards making them and yourself happy.'

'That is what I want to do,' said Kate, eagerly. 'I want you to manage so that I can have some of your poor patients to tea here, in the large kitchen, on Christmas Day; it would make them a little bit happier, I think. I don't know that it would do much good, but they would enjoy it, wouldn't they, father?'

'It would do them good, Kate,' said Dr. Layard; 'making people happy sometimes goes before mak-

ing them good. In the hospital at times we make our patients as happy as they can be before the sharp operation; sometimes the sharp operation has to come first. We'll try the merry Christmas for them this year, and then you must do what you can for them afterwards.'

Aunt Brooks, somewhat unexpectedly, gave a very gracious assent to Dr. Layard's proposal, on condition that Kate took all the trouble of preparing for the guests, and entertaining them when they came. It made her busy enough for two or three days, and she tried to throw all her sad heart into it.

'Kate,' said Dr. Layard, on Christmas Eve, 'we have forgotten one of our old favourites, who has not been here for months. You recollect old Mrs. Duffy, who used to go about with a basket of bobbins and tapes? Of all my poor patients, she ought to be present at your *soirée*.'

Dr. Layard persisted in calling the intended tea-party Kate's *soirée*, and had taken an unusual interest in it. She was feeling more sorrowful than ever, this Christmas Eve, when everybody seemed so absurdly gay. She was wearing her dowdiest dress; and she found it difficult to get up a smile when her father spoke of the *soirée*. How different it would have been if Philip Carey had been true to her!

'Can I find Mrs. Duffy this evening?' she asked,

willing to escape from her sad thoughts for a little time.

'Easily,' said Dr. Layard; 'she lives in Wright's Court, out of New Street, the last house but two on your left hand, I think. Anybody would tell you where it is. If you are frightened, take Bob with you.'

It was a dark night when Kate started out, without Bob, for she was not frightened; she was too miserable to be frightened. The passing relief she had felt in making her arrangements for her Christmas tea-party was spent, and the universal merriment only served to deepen her own loneliness and disappointment. The streets were full and noisy, but not disorderly. The church bells were ringing in anticipation of the coming day, and a general holiday tone was diffused through the crowd, though business was going on briskly. Groups of little children were gathering round the brilliant shop-windows, choosing impossible Christmas presents for themselves and each other from the magnificent display within, and laughing with pathetic mirth at their own daring dreams. Kate caught herself wondering if she should ever laugh at her own vanished dream.

Wright's Court was not a good specimen of street architecture and paving. The houses were as low as they could be to boast of two stories, and the pavement was eccentric, making it necessary to take each step with great caution. An open gutter ran down

the middle, and through the passage which formed the entrance; a passage four feet wide and twenty feet long, dimly lighted by one lamp in the street, which shone behind Kate as she walked up it, and threw her shadow bewilderingly before her. The court itself had no light but that which came through the uncurtained windows of the dwellings on each side, through which she caught glimpses of startling phases of English life, before she reached Mrs. Duffy's door, where she stood a minute or two in the dark, looking through the small panes of the casement close beside it.

It was a very little kitchen, but quite large enough for the furniture it contained. There was an old box under the window, and one shelf against the wall, holding all Mrs. Duffy's china and plate. The only chair, and a tiny table, standing on three thick legs, were drawn up to the fireplace, in which a few coals were burning. Two old tin candlesticks and a flat-iron adorned the chimneypiece, and Kate saw, with a slight prick of her conscience, for she had not cared to decorate the house at home, that a bit of holly had been stuck into each candlestick, as well as into every other pane of the little window. Mrs. Duffy herself was seated in the chair, apparently amusing herself with a pantomime of taking tea, for there was a black teapot and a cracked cup and saucer on the table, but there was no food upon it, and when she

held the teapot almost perpendicularly only a few drops fell from the spout. She put it down, and looked placidly into the embers, shaking her head a little from time to time, but gently, as if more in remembrance of the past than in reproach of the present. She was a clean, fresh-looking old woman, with no teeth, and her cheeks formed a little ball, like a withered rosy apple, between her hollow eyes and sunken mouth.

'The Lord love you, my dear,' said Mrs. Duffy, when Kate went in, and delivered her message, 'and the good doctor, too. It isn't everybody as has such friends as me—on a Christmas Eve, too, when a body feels so lonesome wi'out friends. I don't mind so much on working days, my dear, but one wants friends of a holiday like Christmas. One can work wi'out friends; but one can't love wi'out friends.'

'No, indeed!' said Kate, with a profound sigh.

'And I've got such good friends!' continued Mrs. Duffy, triumphantly; 'there's one as gave me sixpence, and another threepenee, and another twopence, only this morning. That came up to elevenpence; so I've bought my Christmas joint, just like other folks, you know. You'd maybe like to see my Christmas joint like other folks, shouldn't you, my dear?'

'I should very much,' answered Kate.

The Christmas joint was evidently a very precious

possession, for it had been laid carefully between a plate and a basin, and these were well tied up in a ragged cloth, and put out of the way of any marauding cat. Kate's eyebrows went up a good deal, and her eyelids smarted a little as if with coming tears, when she saw it. It was a morsel of coarse beef, which would not have covered the old woman's hand, but which she regarded with unconcealed satisfaction and delight.

'That cost sevenpence,' she said, 'and I bought two pennyworth of greens, and a twopenny loaf to eat with it—me and a friend of mine, as is coming to dine with me. It's a very poor lame girl as lives down the court; very poor, indeed, so I asked her to come and help to eat my Christmas joint, which is exceedingly pleasant to me. The neighbour next door has promised to lend me a chair; we're all so friendly one with another.'

'Then if you have a visitor you must bring her with you to tea,' said Kate, 'and any children you have. Haven't you got any sons or daughters? You'd enjoy yourself more with them there.'

'Bless your kind heart all the same,' answered Mrs. Duffy, her cheerful face overcast for a moment; 'I never had more than one bonny boy, and he went off to Australy nigh upon thirty years ago. My Johnny he was. Sometimes I think as I shall never see him again. I was thinking of him when your knock came to the door. He was going on for twenty;

and I was a strong woman of forty then. I doubt whether Johnny' ud know his poor old mother again if he did come back.'

'How long is it since you heard from him?' enquired Kate.

'I never heard from him at all,' said Mrs. Duffy, in a matter-of-course tone; 'he couldn't write, and I couldn't write. But he went to Australy, and he is in Australy now, if he hasn't tumbled off. I can't help thinking at times he must ha' tumbled off, though the flies never do tumble off the ceiling. I've watched 'em for hours and hours together, thinking of my Johnny, and no fly never tumbled off yet. They have to walk with their heads downwards in Australy, like them flies; but my Johnny wasn't brought up to it, and I'm afeard for him at times.'

'Oh, no, he couldn't tumble off,' said Kate, laughing a little; 'but are you sure you would know him yourself, Mrs. Duffy, after thirty years?'

'Can a mother forget her own boy?' asked the old woman; 'ay, ay; I should know my Johnny among a thousand, or tens of thousands. I'll be glad to bring my friend with me to-morrow, and many thanks to you for asking her. I've got to go out into the country to sing a carril or two at a farm-house, where they're always very good to me; but that'll be afore dinner; and we'll come punctual to your house at five

o'clock, me and my friend; and a merry Christmas and a happy New Year to every one of us, and you above all, my dear.'

'A miserable Christmas, and an unhappy New Year it will be for me,' thought Kate; but she did not say it. Mrs. Duffy insisted upon lighting her down the court with her only candle, which guttered and wasted terribly in the night wind; and the last glance she had of the kindly, withered old face was lit up by its flickering flame at the entrance of the dark passage.

Very early in the morning, long before the Christmas sun was ready to show itself, Mrs. Duffy roused up to the fact that if she was to sing a 'carril' a mile and a half away in the country, it was time to set out. Even her hard heap of rags and straw, with the thin, scanty blanket she had been shivering under all night, were more attractive to her at seventy years of age than the long, lonely walk, through lanes deep down between high hedgerows, with cartruts filled with mingled mud and ice. But she was of a brave and grateful heart, and after a short prayer for herself and everybody, uttered before quitting the feeble warmth of her bed, she sallied out into the chill frostiness of the coming dawn. Up and down the street she heard the shrill voices of children chanting some Christmas ditty; and she thought of Johnny when he was a boy,

with his yellow hair, and round, red face, turning out all eagerness and hope on a Christmas morning, and singing in a voice which could not fail to rouse the most determined sleeper.

'He came home once with three shillings and twopence halfpenny, all in ha'pence,' thought Mrs. Duffy, wiping away a tear from the sunken corner of her eye.

It was a wearisome walk to the farm-house; but as soon as she had reached the porch, and lifting up her quavering voice, began, 'God rest you, merry gentlefolk, Let nothing you dismay,' the door was flung open quickly, and she was called in, and set before such a breakfast as she had not seen for years. Poor old Mrs. Duffy's heart was very full, and before she could swallow a morsel, she said in a slow and tremulous voice: 'I can't think what's come to folks this year. It's like them blessed Christmases we shall have when everybody's friends, when the lion is friends with the lamb, and the cockatrices with the babies. Here's Dr. Layard's daughter asked me to tea, and I've got a Christmas joint, and now there's such a breakfast as I never see before, and me done nothing for it. I can't think what's come to folks; but it's a blessed Christmas, it is.'

'You'll sing your carol for us better after breakfast,' said the farmer's wife, 'and my husband's father has given me a shilling for you.'

Mrs. Duffy shed a few very blissful tears, and after breakfast sang two or three carols, with as much zeal and energy as though they were sure to bring down many blessings on the hospitable roof. It was a little after nine o'clock when she left the house ; but there was the Christmas dinner to cook, and it was necessary to go home early for that. She bade them good-by, and took her way joyously across the fields lying in winter-fallow, through which there was a nearer way back to the town.

Mrs. Duffy was just turning out of the fields into the high road, when a man suddenly started up from behind the hedge, and laid his hand roughly on her shoulder. He was a big, heavy-looking fellow, in the ordinary dress of a labourer ; and he seemed, even at that early hour, to be half stupefied with drink. She looked into his coarse face, with a feeling of terror which was new to her.

'I want a shilling off you,' he said, fiercely.

'A shilling!' she cried, 'where should a poor woman like me have a shilling from?'

'Haven't you got a shilling?' he demanded.

Poor Mrs. Duffy had prided herself all her life on never having told a lie. She looked up and down the road, but there was not a creature in sight ; and she glanced again hopelessly into the man's savage and stupid face. What should she do? To part with

the shilling just given to her would be a very great loss; and she knew it would only be spent in the nearest public-house. Should she be doing very wrong to deny having one? It was the first time for years that she had had a whole silver shilling about her; and any moment during that time she could have replied 'No' boldly and truthfully. Might she not say 'No' just this once?

'Haven't you got a shilling?' he repeated, shaking her shoulder roughly.

'Well,' she said, feebly, 'I haven't had a shilling ever so long; but I have got one now. I'm a very poor old woman, my good young man. If I'd got a penny, I'd give it you, and welcome.'

'I must have your shilling,' he said, doggedly.

'I can't give it you, indeed,' she answered; 'there's my rent, and coals, and other things; and I'm very poor. You'd only drink it.'

She had scarcely finished speaking, when she saw the stranger produce a pistol from under his jacket, and point it at her. There was a sudden flash before her eyes, and she felt a keen pain; then she fell down without feeling or consciousness under the hedge-bank on the high road. A few minutes later, Dr. Layard's brougham was stopping at a toll-gate just outside the town, when a labouring man, who was striding swiftly past, spoke a few words to the driver. Dr. Layard

was inside, with Kate, who was going out with him to see her godfather, a clergyman in the next parish. The doctor, having finished what he had to say to the gatekeeper, inquired what the labourer had said in passing.

'He says there's a woman up the road, who's been shot, sir,' answered the servant, 'and he says to me, "Look sharp after her, she's an old woman, and very poor."'

'Shot!' exclaimed Dr. Layard; 'drive on then, quickly. Katie, don't be frightened. Gate, look after that fellow who has just gone through.'

The last order was shouted through the window, as the carriage rolled rapidly away. In a few minutes they gained the spot where the old woman was lying as one dead, under the leafless hedge, with the blood staining the thin shawl which was wrapped about her. Her old wrinkled face had lost all its apple-red, and her grey hair, scanty and short, had fallen down from under her white cap. Both Dr. Layard and Katie exclaimed in one breath, 'Mrs. Duffy!'

Kate was not wanting in nerve, though she felt a little shaken, and exceedingly troubled. She left the carriage, and sat down on the bank, supporting Mrs. Duffy in her arms, while Dr. Layard made a brief examination of the wounds in the poor old neck and shoulder. His expression was very grave, and he

stood for a few moments deliberating silently, with his eyes fastened upon the deathlike face of Mrs. Duffy, and the pretty, anxious face of his daughter.

'Is it dangerous?' asked Kate, falteringly.

'Almost fatal,' he answered; 'within a touch of death. There's one chance. I'm thinking of driving straight to Lentford Hospital. It's a good level road all the way, and the hospital is at this end of the town. If you get into the brougham first, I can lift the old woman, and place her in an easy posture against you. Could you hold her pretty much as you are now for an hour or more? I'd do it myself; but you could not lift her in as I shall do. Are you strong enough?'

'I will be strong enough; I will do it,' said Kate, lifting up her head with determination and endurance in every line of her face.

It did not occur to Dr. Layard that his carriage was a new one, handsomely lined and fitted up; but the servant's soul ran more upon such subjects, and he began to protest against lifting the wounded and bleeding woman into it. Such a very miserable old creature, too, thought Bob, not a bit of a lady.

'Dolt! idiot! brute!' ejaculated Dr. Layard, in high wrath; and Bob, who had only uttered half his protest, shut his mouth, and was silent.

It seemed a very long time to Kate, though the

carriage bowled rapidly along the smooth, straight old Roman road. Poor Mrs. Duffy gave no sign of life, but lay against her heavily, with her grey head resting upon Kate's shoulder. She held her as tenderly as she could, now and then clasping her warm fingers about her wrist, which was knotted and brown with age and hard work, but which gave no throb back to Kate's touch. Dr. Layard, who rode outside with Bob, looked round from time to time, nodding to her, but with so grave a face that she felt the case was very serious. She thanked God fervently when the spires of Lentford came in sight, and the last notes of the morning chimes fell upon her ear. There were streams of people going to church, exchanging cheery salutations with one another; but many a person caught a glimpse of Kate's pale and agitated face, and the grey head lying against her neck, and felt a shadow pass over their own Christmas gladness.

Dr. Layard's carriage drove into the courtyard of the hospital, and then Kate was quickly relieved of her burden. Mrs. Duffy was carried away, and Dr. Layard followed her. Kate sat there, anxious and troubled, while the clock in the nearest church tower struck one quarter after another, and Bob drove up and down at a snail's pace in dreary and monotonous turns. At length some one beckoned to him from the hospital portico, and Bob responded with an alacrity

which betrayed his impatience. Kate only saw at the last moment that it was Dr. Carey, not her father, who had summoned him; and she shrank back, breathless and tremulous, into the corner of the carriage which concealed her best from him.

'Bob, your master says you must drive home,' said Dr. Carey; 'he will return by train in the afternoon.'

'And the old woman, sir?' said Bob, 'how's she going on?'

'Very little hope,' answered Philip Carey, whose face Kate could not see, but whose voice made every nerve thrill.

'Is it murder?' asked Bob, who had known Dr. Carey as his master's assistant, and stood on very little ceremony with him.

'I'm afraid so,' he said; 'how are they all at home, Bob? Miss Brooks and Miss Kate?'

'She's in there,' said Bob, pointing with his thumb to the carriage. Kate roused herself to lift up her head with dignity, sit erect upon her seat, and meet Dr. Carey's salutation calmly. It was nearly four weeks since he had written to her, and she had replied, 'Come.' He looked at her with an amazed and confused expression, and took off his hat, but did not attempt to speak. Both of them coloured, and both bowed stiffly and in silence. Then Philip Carey, still bareheaded, and as if lost in thought, walked slowly

back up the broad steps of the portico, and Kate cried most of the way home.

'I never saw anything like that,' thought Bob; 'and they used to be like brother and sister, almost.'

It was late in the afternoon when Dr. Layard returned, and then he had to see the superintendent of police. The stranger who had passed through the toll-gate had not yet been found; but he could not be far off, and Bob was ready to swear to him when he was taken. Kate's Christmas party passed off more successfully because one of the invited guests had been almost murdered on the highway. The news ran like wildfire through the town and neighbourhood, and the farmer's wife came to tell of Mrs. Duffy's morning visit, and her cheerful carols just before the villain met her. She and Kate mingled their tears together over the recital, and Kate ended her miserable Christmas by going to bed with a very heavy heart.

The next day the stranger was found and sworn to by Bob, though he flatly denied having been anywhere in the direction of the toll-bar. Neither Dr. Layard nor the toll-man could swear to him, as he had passed on the farther side of the carriage while they were talking at the other window. He was an utter stranger in the neighbourhood, without friends, and he stated that he was on the tramp. A very old pistol was found in a ditch near the spot where Mrs. Duffy

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had been shot. The man was sent in safe custody to Lentford, to be brought face to face with the old woman, if she should recover consciousness enough to identify him and give her evidence against him.

For twenty-four hours or more it continued very doubtful whether the poor old creature would ever rally. She had not spoken since she had been found, but she lay perfectly tranquil and patient on her hospital bed. Now and then a gleam of a smile, like the momentary glimmer of the sun on a cloudy day crossed her face, and her lips moved slightly, as if she were whispering. She knew when they were doing anything for her, for she tried to help herself, to raise her thin hand, or turn her grey head upon the pillow for them to see her neck. Dr. Carey, who had known her in former days, spent as much time as he could beside her bed; and towards the close of the day, just before the night nurse was coming to take her turn, he heard her voice speaking articulately but very slowly and faintly, and he stooped over her to listen to what she said.

'Dr. Layard's daughter! Dr. Layard's daughter!' she murmured.

'Would you like to see Dr. Layard's daughter?' asked Philip Carey, in his clearest and most pleasant tone.

'Ay, ay,' whispered the old woman.

'To-morrow you shall,' he said; 'it is too late now. To-morrow.'

'Ay, ay,' she assented, cheerfully.

'You will be better to-morrow,' he suggested.

'No, no,' murmured the old woman. 'He shot me dead because I wouldn't give him my shilling. He robbed me.'

'There's a shilling wrapped up in a bit of blue sugar-paper in your pocket,' said Dr. Carey. A sparkle of satisfaction shone upon the poor drawn face, and then Mrs. Duffy fell quietly asleep.

She was certainly somewhat better in the morning, and watching the people who were about her; her mind was clear, and she evidently knew her circumstances, where she was, and what had happened to her. Before noon Dr. Layard and Kate arrived; and Mrs. Duffy's sunken blue eyes brightened, yet filled with tears, as she looked up into their faces bending pityingly above her.

'Well, old friend,' said Dr. Layard, heartily, 'you are better already. We are going to pull you through, you'll see, Carey and me. We know what a tough old lady you are. Carey used to play you some tricks in the old times, and now he'll make it up to you by pulling you through. Won't you, Carey?'

Kate had not seen him enter the ward, and now she sat down, feeling weak and tremulous, on a

chair at Mrs. Duffy's head, keeping her eyes fixed upon the old woman's face. Dr .Carey's voice sounded oddly in her ears, as if he was speaking in very loud and constrained tones.

'I am going to do my best,' he said, 'but you must keep yourself quite still now, Mrs. Duffy, and get up your strength to tell the magistrate your story. You are a brave old woman, and won't be afraid ; and I'll tell them you never told a lie in your life.'

Mrs. Duffy smiled, but did not speak. She had not spoken yet, but she stretched out her hand, and tried to turn towards Kate. Dr. Carey seemed to understand her meaning perfectly.

'You want Dr. Layard's daughter to sit where you can see her?' he said. 'You want her to stay with you ?'

'Ay, ay,' she answered. 'God bless her !'

It was Philip Carey who moved Kate's chair, and placed it in a convenient position for old Mrs. Duffy to see her. She glanced at him once, but his eyes were downcast, and his aspect very solemn. He bade one of the nurses bring her a footstool, and then he and her father went away, and old Mrs. Duffy, smiling now and then, closed her eyes and seemed to fall into a doze.

It was a very quiet hour for Kate. The ward was a small one, containing only four beds, and no

other patient in it. The nurses were busy, and had all gone away, leaving her alone. A wintry sunshine was falling through the farthest window upon the bare white walls. Her mind was strangely divided between Mrs. Duffy and Philip Carey, whose life was spent mostly within these walls. He had spoken so kindly, even affectionately, to this poor, friendless old woman, but he had not spoken a word to her. How was it that he could be so fickle, so cruel towards her? What reason or motive could possibly have made him change his mind so suddenly and so dishonourably, and plunge her into so much wretchedness and perplexity? She could not bear to meet him, yet she would have to bear it, for her father was so fond of him. How proud and happy her father would have been in him as his son in-law! It was too hard even to think of. Perhaps she would even have the misery some day of seeing his wife, the girl who had supplanted her, and made her life a blank. For Kate felt sure that it would be impossible for her ever to love another man. No one else could be to her what Philip Carey had been.

The hour passed away, and there were several quiet signs of excitement. Dr. Layard and Dr. Carey came in, felt the old woman's pulse, and gave her a cordial. Kate was told that if she could be calm she had better remain where she was, as Mrs. Duffy held

her hand closely, and wished her to stay. Three or four strange gentlemen came in, and stood about the bed, while Mrs. Duffy, in very feeble tones, told her story, which was written down, word for word, from her lips. She had not much to say, and it was soon over.

'Could you identify the individual?' inquired the magistrate's clerk.

'Should you know the man again?' asked Dr. Carey, who was standing close to Kate, and near old Mrs. Duffy.

'Ay, to be sure,' she answered, with more energy than she had displayed before.

'He has been taken;' said Dr. Layard; 'that is, a man has been taken up, and we think he is the man. You must see him yourself.'

The old woman shuddered, and grasped Kate's hand tightly. It might have been Dr. Carey's hand, for he seemed conscious of the close grasp, and answered to it.

'Come, come,' he said, encouragingly, 'you never used to be a coward; and you have only to open your eyes, and look at him. You have plenty of friends about you, you know.'

'He's a dreadful man,' she said, in a whisper, 'but let him come.'

Kate herself felt a strong thrill of excitement, as

she listened to the regular tramp of the policeman, and the shambling tread of the murderer, coming down the bare boards of the ward. The old woman had closed her eyes, as if to gather strength for the dreadful detective gaze. Dr. Carey laid his hand on the back of Kate's chair, so close to her it almost touched her shoulder, and one of her brown curls fell upon it. The footsteps came on to the side of the bed, and stopped there. Kate turned her head and took one frightened glance. The murderer was a middle-aged man, with a full, heavy, red face, and light hair just turning grey, not a vicious-looking man on the whole; he might have been a decent, honest, creditable fellow, but for the drinking habits which had brutalised him. He was looking down at the wounded old woman with an air half sorrowful and half ashamed; but a little sullen also, as a boy looks when caught in some fault. The policeman at his right hand was the only sign to mark him out as a criminal; and he seemed as much on the alert as if he expected him to make a second murderous attack on the old woman in her bed. For a minute or two all were silent in the room. Mrs. Duffy's eyelids were closed, and her lips moved as if in prayer. She looked up at last; and her dim blue eyes, which were full of terror, like those of a child who wakes frightened, changed like those of a child,

when it sees that the face bending over it is a familiar face.

'Why,' she cried, in a voice at once firm and glad, 'it's my boy! It's my Johnny!'

Her wrinkled features began to work with emotion, and she was about to raise herself up to stretch out her arms to him, but Dr. Carey was quick enough to prevent her. He threw himself on his knees at Kate's feet, and laid his strong arm gently across the old woman. Every one else stood motionless and thunderstruck. The man himself did not stir hand or foot.

'That's my son as went to Australy,' continued Mrs. Duffy; 'please let him come and kiss me. Don't you know your poor old mother again, Johnny?'

'Oh, mother! mother!' exclaimed the man, striking his hard hands together, 'that's my mother sir, as I came back to, and was looking for. I hadn't seen her these thirty years, and she's nothing like the woman she was. You'll let me go and kiss her, maybe?'

He had spoken to the policeman next to him, and his official eye was softened; but the magistrates were there, and the indulgence was not his to grant.

'Is this the person who attempted first to rob and then to murder you?' asked the magistrate's clerk.

'Oh, dear no! it's my boy,' said the old woman; 'he'd never shoot at his mother, bless you! It was quite a different man, not him; a dreadful man. That's the boy I nursed, and taught him his prayers. He'd never lift up his hand agen me; please let him go.'

There was no question in Mrs. Duffy's mind as to whether she was telling the truth or not. Her gladness was so great that her mind utterly refused the incredible and impossible idea that her own son could have thought of robbing and murdering her. If he had been brought before her red-handed with her blood, she would still have believed herself mistaken. It was some ruffian and monster who had shot her, not her son. As for him, his heavy, bloodshot eyes were filled with tears, and his voice, as he began to speak, was choked and husky.

'Sir,' he said, addressing no one in particular, 'she's not like the same woman, but she's my mother. She had brown hair, and was very strong. I never thought of her being like that. I wish I'd kept free from drink. Nobody knows what drink'll bring him to. She's my mother; and I came back to work for her, if she were still alive. I'll never taste a drop again as long's I live.'

'Hush, hush!' said Dr. Layard, coming behind him, and tapping him on the shoulder; 'hold your

tongue, my good fellow. You'll make your mother worse again if you talk. There's a good chance for her if she's kept quiet.'

The magistrates and their clerk walked away to the end of the ward, and held a short consultation there. There was not much doubt that this man was the right man; but there was no one to bring home the crime to him, except his mother. Bob, Dr. Layard's servant, swore positively that he was the man who told him a woman was lying in the road murdered; but the woman herself denied that it was he who had attacked her. To be sure there was more than sufficient reason for her to do so, but if she persisted in it, what was to be done?

'You must remember you are upon your oath,' said the elder magistrate, 'and probably upon your deathbed. Now look at this man carefully, and tell me if he is not the man who shot at you.'

Mrs. Duffy gazed earnestly at her son, smiling more and more, until her pale, shrunken face grew radiant with happiness.

'Why, it couldn't be him,' she said, 'how could it? Ay, ay; I could swear it were never him; my Johnny. Please let him stay aside of me for a bit. The police may stop for him if you like; but he'd never do it.'

'Carey and I will be bail for him, if it's necessary,'

said Dr. Layard, 'only let the poor fellow shake hands with his mother. There, let him go.'

The man seemed to slip suddenly from the policeman's grasp, and sunk down on his knees at his mother's feet, hiding his face in the bed-clothes, and sobbing till the bed shook under him. All the time his mother's eyes were shining upon him, and her arms, still kept firmly down by Dr. Carey, were trembling to touch him.

The magistrates and their retinue went their way, leaving Mrs. Duffy with her son, while Kate and Philip Carey stood by, a little aloof from them, and from each other. The man crept closer and closer to his mother, till his hot and heavy face rested upon her hand. There was a deep silence in the ward. Outside in the corridor, through the half open door, could be seen the policeman, still waiting for final orders.

'Mother,' sobbed out Duffy, in a smothered and faltering voice, 'can you forgive me?'

'Why! there's nothing to forgive, Johnny,' she said, 'and I'm so happy, I'd forgive everybody. I'd forgive the raskill as shot me. I have forgive him already, Johnny.'

'I want you to get well, mother,' he said, with desperate earnestness, 'and I'll make it all up to you.

I'm come back to work for you, and indeed, I'll work. Will you forgive me, mother?'

'Forgive you, Johnny!' she murmured. 'it's a easy thing to forgive a body when you love a body.'

The last words dropped faintly, syllable by syllable, from the old woman's white lips, and Kate's heart sank like lead. The withered face had grown paler, and the wrinkled eyelids closed slowly over the filmy blue eyes. Kate uttered a low cry of trouble, and Philip Carey turned quickly towards her.

'Is she going to die, Philip?' asked Kate.

'She is very faint,' he replied, 'She has been too much excited, but she may rally yet. Go and send me a nurse, and do not return yourself.'

Kate walked softly down the ward, the tears falling fast from her eyes. She was no longer grieving over her own troubles, but for the hopeful, cheery, brave old woman, who had met her long-lost son again in such a manner, and at such a moment as this. She waited in the matron's parlour until a message was brought to her that Mrs. Duffy was sleeping again, with her son watching and waiting beside her. Then she returned home with her father.

'I've not the shadow of a doubt Duffy's the man,' shouted Dr. Layard to her, above the noise of the train; 'but the thing cannot be brought home to him. The old woman is as true as truth itself, but she is

labouring under a delusion. She no more believes that her son was the man who shot at her than I believe that you did it. I question whether she would believe Duffy himself if he owned it to her, which he must not do. I've told him so. I said, "Duffy, I feel pretty sure you are the villain that did it, and if she dies I'll do my best to prove it. But never you tell your mother it was yourself; it would go far to break her heart." And he said, "I'll never speak a word about it, one way or the other, sir." Oh! Duffy did it!'

'Do you think she will die?' asked Kate.

'Carey will do his best for her,' said Dr. Layard; 'I never saw such a change in a young fellow as there is in Carey. He is as dull as a beetle; just when he has got all he has been striving for, too! I don't understand it.'

Kate believed she understood it, but she kept silence. It was not likely he could feel happy and at ease in her presence or her father's if he had a spark of feeling; and he certainly possessed a good deal of feeling. She had caught his eye once during the strange interview round Mrs. Duffy's bed, and they had looked at one another with a sympathy which had seemed at the moment the most natural thing in the world. She had called him Philip, too! How her cheeks burned at the very recollection. She wished she had preserved to the end an icy dignity of

manner towards him; but she had altogether forgotten herself, and it had been a happier moment than she had felt for these four weeks past. Perhaps utter forgetfulness of self is the only real happiness.

The next morning Kate was once more sitting alone before the fire in the breakfast-room, with nothing particular to do, until it was time to start for Lentford once more, when the servant brought in a large official-looking cover, with the words 'Dead Letter Office' printed upon it, and addressed 'Miss Kate Layard, Ilverton.' It was the first time in her life that Kate had ever received such an ominous-looking packet. She opened it with some trepidation, and drew from it her own brief note to Philip Carey, written four weeks before. The envelope bore several postmarks upon it, with directions to try one town after another—Liverpool, then Manchester, then London—but it was several minutes before she discovered how it had all happened. Her own handwriting lay before her eyes, or she could never have believed it: she had directed her letter to 'Dr. Carey, Everton Square, Liverpool.'

How Kate had come to write Liverpool instead of Lentford she could never understand. It was true Philip had gone to Liverpool after leaving Ilverton, but how stupid of her to make such a dreadful mistake! Then he, too, had been passing through

as miserable a time as herself. He must have come to the conclusion that she did not care for him, and that she had not even the grace to thank him for the love he had bestowed upon her in vain. What could he have thought of her? It must have been a pain to him. She would make it up to him in some way.

Kate's brain was in a whirl all the way to Lentford. She walked up the broad steps of the hospital portico like one in a dream. The fat porter, in his handsome livery, nodded pleasantly at her; and the students, hurrying along the broad corridors, took off their hats to Dr. Layard's pretty daughter. She had to pass by a recess as large as a good-sized room, with benches round and across it, upon which were seated rows of poor patients, waiting humbly for their turn to go in and see the doctor. The doorkeeper had just opened the door an inch or two, and Kate saw Philip Carey's face, grave and careworn, listening to a poor woman who was just going away by another entrance. She laid her hand upon the arm of the patient who was going in, and passed on into the room instead. 'Philip,' she said, her face flushing at his look of amazement, 'I am only going to stay one moment. I have been so miserable. I wrote this four weeks ago.'

'Wrote what?' he asked, clasping the hand with

which she offered him the misdirected letter, and holding both closely.

'I only wrote "Come,"' stammered Kate, the tears starting into her eyes, 'and I thought—oh, I don't know what I thought! I directed it to Liverpool instead of Lentford, and it's been wandering about ever since. Do you understand?'

'Do you mean you will be my wife?' he asked.

'Yes,' she answered.

They had only three minutes to themselves. Three minutes was the time allotted for each case, and as it expired the door was opened again an inch or two to see if the doctor was ready for the next patient. Dr. Carey led Kate to the other door, and dismissed her with a glance which set her heart beating fast with happiness. She mounted the long flight of stairs and entered the ward where Mrs. Duffy was lying as if she trod on air. The old woman was resting very comfortably in bed, her eyes calm and bright, and a faint streak of the old apple-red beginning to show itself upon her cheek. The good chance for her recovery was a still better one this morning.

'He's coming back again this morning,' she whispered in Kate's ear; 'they let him stay beside me all yesterday, and he's coming back again to-day. It's a beautiful Christmas this is; I never knew one

like it. 'I hope they'll never catch that poor raskill as shot me, I do. It 'ud spoil my Christmas and Johnny's if they did. Has it been a happy Christmas for you, my dear?'

'Very happy,' answered Kate, with a bright smile, as the present joy blotted out the remembrance of the past sorrow.

'That's right, my dear!' murmured Mrs. Duffy, 'I don't know as ever I knew such a Christmas.'

There is little more to be told. Dr. Carey made his appearance at Dr. Layard's that evening, and delighted him beyond measure by asking him for Kate. Mrs. Duffy recovered and lived two or three years longer in undisturbed happiness, and in a degree of comfort to which she had been unaccustomed throughout her life. For her son, who had not prospered much in Australia, worked industriously and steadily to maintain her at home, and devoted himself to her with real tenderness. It was not till after her death, when Kate Carey was standing beside her coffin looking down at the placid face and closed eyes of the old woman, that he told the story of his return home.

'I'd worked my passage across, ma'am,' he said, the tears rolling down his cheeks, 'and I'd landed in Liverpool a week afore Christmas, with as much as five pound in my pocket, all I'd saved in Australy;

and there were a lot set on me, and took me to a public, and I suppose I drank all my wits away. I reached Ilverton by the last train on Christmas Eve, but I didn't know as mother were gone to live in the town. It were a bitter night, and I slept on a bench at the railway station. I hadn't a penny left, when I set out to seek mother; and I were wandering about very miserable, when I saw a decent old woman coming along all alone. I only thought I'd frighten a shilling out of her. I never meant no harm. The pistol were an old pistol I'd had in the bush; and I didn't recollect it was loaded, and it went bursting off, all in an instant of time. That quite brought me to, and I were running away to find somebody, when I see you and the doctor coming. I seemed to know it were a doctor. But when I found out it were my own poor old mother, which I did face to face with her in the hospital, I felt as I should die. She never knew as it were me, never. She used to talk about him, and say, "I forgave him, Johnny, and I hope God has forgave him too, whoever he is." I shall never see another woman like my poor old mother.'

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